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# HELPFUL THOUGHTS

FOR

## YOUNG MEN.

### THREE DISCOURSES

BY

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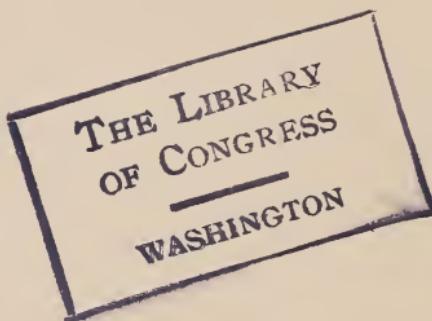
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BOSTON:  
PUBLISHED BY D. LOTHROP & CO.  
DOVER, N. H.: G. T. DAY & CO.

1874.

312556 E+

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## STRENGTH TO DO ALL THINGS.

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"I can do all things through Jesus Christ which strengtheneth me." — PHILIPPIANS iv. 13.

THE question, what is practicable, especially what each individual can do in the world, is one of very great importance. At no time is such an inquiry of more importance than when a young man, being emancipated in a great measure from the control of others, is now thrown upon his own resources, for at this time a wrong estimate of what is practicable for him may lead him into great mistakes. He may either overrate his powers and the facility with which he can overcome obstacles, and so attempt things beyond his reach, or he may underrated his powers and magnify the difficulties he is appointed to encounter, and so desert his proper post in the world. Nor is the question, so important at first, answered once for all, but it comes back continually into the mind through life. Every one has to ask, "Am I equal to this or that undertaking?" "Is the risk too great to be run?" "Is the enterprise practicable for any one?" "Are my

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powers what they have been?" These and questions of similar import, need to be answered as long as a man lives; and to one who wants to make the most of himself and of life, they are of very great interest.

The apostle Paul lets us know, in the text, how he would answer this question. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." By the words *all things* he evidently did not intend all things *conceivable*, but all things *to which he might be called* in the alternations of life. His thought turns more particularly towards things to be endured or met with: "I know," says he, "both how to be abased and I know how to abound; everywhere, and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need; I can do all things"—literally I have strength for everything—"through (or in) Christ, because he gives me power." It is a divine gift surely to learn how *to endure*, but he did not mean to confine his remark to this; his active powers also, his faculty of undertaking and of accomplishing were enlarged,—both as his consciousness and his judgment founded on experience told him,—by strength drawn from Christ. He means to say, without question, not merely that faith in Christ as

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a strengthener made him feel equal to every call of duty, but also that Christ actually strengthened him. Both the subjective and the objective strength were supplied ; he did not find his power of action increased by a faith in an unreal object, nor did a real object strengthen him otherwise than through his own soul. Christ's strength and his activity went together.

The passage calls us to consider the truth that the working powers of a Christian man are enlarged by strength drawn from Christ ; or — to put the same truth into another shape, the question what is practicable in this world will be decided differently, in a multitude of cases, by a man of the world and a man of faith. Only then, do we attain to a true measure of what we can do, and have all the impulses of action within our reach, when we take into view both our native power and the strength we can obtain from Christ.

We admit, however, at the outset, that there are many situations and performances in life to which man is equal by his own unaided strength. There are certain things which are impracticable, and certain others which can be done by the ordinary powers of man. Between these boundaries there lies a region where risks are incurred, and judg-

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ment of men and of events is a great element of success, where the shrewd calculator is likely to reach a higher point than a Christian. The native qualities which are fitted to encounter these risks of life, are sharpened by experience into great adroitness and practical wisdom. It does not seem to require any help from Christ to instruct the merchant when to furl his sails and when to spread them to the breeze, or the politician whom to put forward as the candidate of his party, or what measures to urge in order to propitiate or deceive the people. Nor do I suppose that Paul supposed that Christ ever promised strength to His followers in such a sense that they might be sure of being guided into earthly prosperity. If He had promised it, He would have subverted the principles of His own Kingdom, which is to be established in human hearts by disaster and suffering, as much, to say the least, as by their contraries. And if any of Christ's followers expect to be secured from temporal ill, or assured of prosperity, except so far as moderation of desires, steadiness of efforts, a right direction of the powers which are results of Christian principles, bring this about, they need to be made wiser by disappointment.

So far, then, the practical man of the worldly

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sort seems to have the advantage of all other men,—of the visionary and of the Christian, whom he may regard as a visionary. He concentrates his efforts, he measures with accuracy the means within his reach, he acquires such practical skill by experience, that as long as he confines himself within his sphere, he may justly feel that he needs no strength. He admits that God may do him great evil by storm, or sickness, or the knavery of others, or wide-sweeping political convulsions, but if God will only leave him alone to take his own path and use his own means to advantage, he is confident of success. And so he may very naturally fall into that elation of mind which we call purse-pride, where a man has made his own money, and which appears very often in other shapes, when other worldly projects have been crowned with unusual success.

But there are departments of life, and those too, of vast bearing on the cultivation of character and on our final destiny, into which the calculations of these practical, self-relying men do not reach; where even the visionary, who judges under the sway of hope and imagination, stands on as good ground as he, and where he who secures for himself the strength of Christ has the advantage of both. There is

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nothing to hinder the Christian from answering wisely the question "What can be done" in all the lower departments of life; and when action in the higher is demanded, he alone can see his way clearly, because he has a strength of vision which is divinely imparted. He, then, is the truly practical man in regard to the higher things of life; he decides what is practicable—especially what is practicable for himself by sounder rules than those which give the merchant his money, or the politician his place.

I. And here we remark in the first place that *Christian principle enables us to control every bias to which our own state of mind subjects us.* In all the great problems of life, the decision of which rests at last with ourselves, these biases more or less affect our judgments. The question "What we ought to do," is involved in the question "What we can do," and this is answered, it may be, under a false view of our powers. So duty itself is neglected; perhaps our very life-work, that toil in which we could gather the most fruit for this and the next world, is set aside on some vain plea.

Now Christ gives us strength, if we wish it, to overcome these subjective influences which can

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lead us into false courses. Take the case of *timidity* for an example. There are gifted men who shrink from great responsibilities as being more than they can bear, and this is so amiable a weakness that they and others see no great harm in it, whereas it may lead to the most positive of sins, to a refusal to fill a place into which providence almost thrusts them. There was a man once, of the highest powers, and of a very noble character, for whom God had designed a place of vast importance in the world's history. But he shrunk back from the mission in a sense of incompetence, though the voice from the bush had appointed him to so great a work. "O Lord," said he, "I am not eloquent—but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." And even after God had said, I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou wilt say, Moses could still reply "O my Lord, send I pray thee by whom thou wilt send," *i. e.* choose any one but me. And so Moses, if God had left him to himself, might have rejected the sublimest offer and opportunity ever bestowed on a man, and tended sheep in Midian instead of delivering Israel and changing the face of ages. It is proper that men should shrink from responsibility, it is not proper that they should throw themselves into

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arduous work without weighing themselves and weighing the occasion; but let them take the strength of Christ into calculation, as a help in preparatory counsels and a help in duty itself, then will the spirit of fear pass away and they will find that they can do all things.

Nor does the *fear of opinion* act in any other way upon our judgments. The appointments God makes for us in his providence may be set aside by a reference to the estimate men form of us or of the service; our convictions are undermined by these judgments; we dare not and so we cannot undertake the work. Anything difficult in which we have not this bugbear to encounter appears easier and more feasible than any thing easy where opposition meets us from man. But here faith can lift us up above the fear of man which bringeth a snare; by communion with Christ we become so thoroughly persuaded of the goodness of the cause that the seeming obstacles disappear, and we say, “God is on our side; what shall we fear if man be against us?”

Another subjective source of error in regard to what we can do is *sloth, or the love of ease*. How this acts we all know, in tempting us not only to shrink in the outset from difficult duty, but to

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neglect our work all along through its progress. The counteracting force can be found only in strong worldly motives on the one hand, or in the strength that comes from Christ on the other. But the range and sphere of the worldly motives is limited. They are shut out from the higher departments of life, from considerations of duty, from the work of improving our character and to a great extent from whatever good has no present and tangible results. Sloth, so far as it obstructs us in the higher work of life, is met by those convictions of the importance of unseen things, which give to all our efforts their right place and play, which do not depress earthly energies because they fasten on something higher, but direct and moderate all the native qualities by bringing them under the control of truth and of Christ.

II. Thus when the subjective sources of error are brought under the power of superior principles, we shall judge better what is practicable for us, and undertake it with more vigor and more hope. Another remark falls naturally into this place—that the practicable may involve *long work*, which we will incline neither to begin nor to continue without *patience*; and that such patience in our higher life-work is strength drawn from Christ.

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There are many who will make short efforts with great ardor, but are found unequal to a steady plan, which is never to end until death. These are the day laborers of life,— they accomplish nothing but as they are directed and superintended ; or they are the rank and file who fight through the battle with superhuman bravery, but are broken down by long marches or give way to long inaction. It would be easy to fulfil our work in this world, if it were only job work, nothing but a series of separate tasks, which offer themselves to us of themselves. Even if the work were hard, there would be no toil of mind with it,.no planning, no waiting, no discouragement, no temptation to impatience. We are apt not to have energy enough for that whose end we cannot descry, and we shrink from it ; we call it unattainable, especially if, like much of our life-work, it is to be completed by a vast number of successive efforts, each of which seems to accomplish nothing. It is *then* we exaggerate the happiness of mere rest, we long to see the end, and we miscalculate risks in favor of sloth or of our fears. Misjudging thus the difficulties to be met with, and misjudging our own powers, it is not strange that we fail lamentably — that we become even wicked and slothful servants.

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It is true that in our worldly work, where all goes on in due order, and faith in the future is not much wanted, patience is common enough. There are multitudes who pursue a plan of wealth, for instance, or of power, through a life-time, owing to the happy balance of their characters between vigorous determination, and self-denying hope. They may make just estimates of the probabilities of success, may cling to their projects through difficulties by the unassisted force of nature, which can do as well in the lower spheres as with special divine help it can in the higher.

But here and in all our life-work he alone can judge correctly what is practicable for him, and can execute what he decrees, who has the unpretending quality of patience, and in the higher work of common life this belongs to all heroic men. Who is he that can execute a work by the highest art? It is the sculptor, or painter, or poet who, in addition to great native endowments, plans long, and turns his work over a thousand times in his mind before expressing it in an outward form; who toils on from week to week, sometimes condemning the labors of weary days and beginning over again; who, when he sees the end, is still dissatisfied, until he has weighed and corrected every stroke.

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Who is he that gains a campaign and ends a war ? It is the patient and long-suffering general, who is firm in his wise purpose, not hurried on by applause, not moved from his track by censure, not disturbed by repulses,— who ploughs his long furrows onward to the edge of the field. And who is he that is best fitted to undertake and perform a work of love in this world of sorrow ? Not he who dashes onward, as if he were cheered by favoring crowds, but he who has a nurse's patience, bearing long with difficulties, with misunderstandings, with opposition, who works, perhaps, in all equanimity alone, until at last others feel the power of his sublime constancy to whom he can leave his half-finished plans as the trustees for mankind.

Now it is possible that all the classes of heroic men may persist in their work from a sentiment of duty and a noble independence of soul without much strength of religious principle and faith. And yet they would in hours of trial be greatly encouraged, and at some crisis be kept from abandoning their plans, if consciousness of God's approval, and faith in His help could throw them out of themselves upon Him. But the great problems of character — those achievements which are said to be greater than the taking of a city — can be regarded

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as practicable only by him whose endurance is strengthened by the strength of Christ. The highest thing a man can plan or purpose in this world is to live for God, and a higher thing still is to lead such a life. This work involves an amount of patience of which the mass of men have no conception. Oh, what a slow process it is, when subdued sins rise again, to have to meet them with the same arguments, with the same resistance, to see years pass away, and leave scarcely a sign of improvement in our characters, to oppose the prevailing tone of opinion and life around us, to keep the dim light of the promises in view amid the clouds, to row against the stream in a lifelong effort, until the sinews give way in death. Oh, is not this heroic ? Where can you find anything nobler than genuine Christian endurance. Is not such a quality most like the unchanging purposes and the unwearied patience of God ? But who can put it forth, save he who has the strength of God with him ? Can the Pharisee enter on such work with success, or rather must he not cease to be a Pharisee, as soon as he becomes aware of the difficulty of being truly good ? “ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail ; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.”

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III. That which is practicable in the more important work of life can be estimated and measured only by him who is strengthened by *Christian faith*. We have considered Christian principle in its power to counteract false judgments concerning the practicable, and have also looked at it in its form of *patience*. In both these actings of Christ within the soul, faith is involved, and yet it is important, in the third place, to look at faith as a separate moving power. And here we wish to take into account not only the efficiency of the principle of faith, but also the real strength imparted through it from the real object, Christ.

The power of what is called faith, regarded as a motive to action, without respect to the reality of the object, is now admitted on all hands, as well by the irreligious philosopher and the deep thinking poet or novelist, as by the Christian. A faith that shall take hold of something invisible, that can rise above laws and facts to eternal principles in the moral world, is felt by them to be essential to the nobler and more efficient characters. It is indeed to them of no significance whether the faith rests on any solid foundation or not, whether it sees an actual star or imagines one, it is still, by a law of character which is real

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itself, a power of no mean force. Faith in God, they think, is about equally efficient whether there be a God or not; the reality has nothing to do with the working power of faith; the inner life is just as well sustained by falsehood as by truth. Faith, in fact, is nothing else but a vigorous inner life projecting itself into something outside of itself, and drawing its real strength — all the while by a law of character — from an unreal, an imagined source. Hence the man of destiny, they say, will, through the persuasion that he is called to do a special work, put forth the energies necessary for its execution, while he might fail, if, with equal ability, he were a matter-of-fact man, who judged according to probabilities within the reach of the understanding. The enthusiast, too, though he be a mere dreamer, works wonders through the dreams which he takes for realities. The belief of the prophet in his own inspiration is his inspiration itself. A blind trust in providence will make a man submissive or courageous, although there be nothing but dead order in the universe.

I accept what is thus affirmed of faith as concerning a certain strength in itself. It is a confession, even on the part of the most unbelieving

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of men, both that a man must have some connection with a real or supposed invisible order of things, in order that he may reach true nobility of character, and that this outward world does not and cannot, by its present realities and interest, supply fit food to the better powers of the soul. The confession reaches as far as this, that not only faith must be exercised to attain the great ends of life beyond the obvious earthly wants, but that there must be some object for it to take hold of, some source, real or imagined, for it from which it can draw its motive influence over life and character. The power of faith consists not in mere believing, but in linking the soul and the invisible order of things together, and in thus placing heart and conduct under their sway. Now if there are no such invisible things, if they are mere chimeras, if there is nothing but infinite death outside of man's little sphere, then falsehood is the only source of nobleness, and as soon as the philosopher who speculates on the powers of faith finds out how empty the world is, he places himself beyond the range of these motives supplied by falsehood. He cannot exercise faith, nor on his own theory have any nobility of life, because he has reached the solid ground of truth.

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But, passing by this, let us look a moment at some of the ways in which faith shows its efficiency. One way is the removal of anxiety,—that it lifts the soul above the agitating and weakening influences of fear. In the development of character the strength which opposes the belittling influence of earthly apprehensions must come from hopes which have an invisible source, just as the motives which take off from the power of earthly hopes must be drawn from fears and convictions which have a spiritual origin. Courage to plan great things, courage to stand alone, courage to bear responsibilities, courage to venture on risks, courage to endure ill-success — this great quality of soul follows in the train of faith. Akin to this is the help it gives us toward forgetting ourselves and being absorbed in an object outside of us. Without a certain degree of self-forgetting we can accomplish little that is either generous or good. If we measure ourselves continually we lose sight of the object outside of us from which strength may be drawn, and, as soon as this pole-star is hidden from our eyes, our direction and our energy are lost. This leads to the additional remark that faith inspires the soul with a joy, arising at once from hopefulness and from this self-

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forgetting activity, which is a great help to success. We overlook dangers which seem frightful as we look back on them, we undertake tasks that would be impossible, if a joyous hope did not lighten them. "Only believe," says our Lord; "all things are possible to him that believeth."

But it is important to add that the faith which is the measure of the practicable must be not faith in a higher order of things simply, but faith in God and in Christ. We have seen that among great men on a worldly pattern he can do most who believes himself the creature of destiny, or the scourge of God, or the emissary to plant a new religion in the world by the force of arms. And so other selfish enterprises may be made easier and be despatched by a hope-inspiring confidence that is false at the bottom. But there are provinces into which this kind of faith cannot enter. The work of relieving human misery, the work of overcoming sin, the work of moral and religious improvement in general, the plainer and the more unselfish efforts to which we may feel ourselves called — these need a faith that takes hold of a *real* object. We enter by it into the plans of God, we are led by it to conceive of that as practicable in doing which we have a harmony

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of soul with a God of righteousness and goodness. It is essential to the energy of the soul in all its higher work, that it believes not only in his willingness to help but in his approval. This is a point that presumptuous faith in destiny can never reach. This secures God on our side—not indeed so as to make success certain, but so as to inspirit us all the while, until whatever aid and effort can reach us has been attained. And then comes the joy of having been faithful.

But there is one vastly important department of action where we can be certain of great results only through the strength of Christ. The gospel proposes to us the formation of a Christian character as the great work of our lives, but it tells us at the same time—what we soon discover from our inward experience—that our native strength for such a task is crippled by sin, and thus if it contained no offer of help from above it would only distress and weaken us by revealing the extent of our duties and of our weakness. The obstacles in the way when we are invited to such a life, the amount of toil to be endured, the patience demanded would soon lead us into despair, if our faith could not take hold of Christ at every step of our progress. Here

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then there is a part of our field of action where it is not enough *to believe*, but there must come *actual* help from a heavenly source. We are conscious of our inadequacy even to conceive of truth in its reality, and when through faith we can accomplish anything, we invariably ascribe our success to some superadded power. To the man of faith nothing is so practicable as just this life after the plan of the gospel. Thousands like ourselves have succeeded by this simple process. Thousands like ourselves, on the other hand, who have striven to be virtuous in the spirit of stoical or Pharisaical self-reliance, have either had before their minds a most defective idea of virtue, or have laid aside their work in discouragement as their standard of perfection grew higher, or, it may be, have in a fit of despair given themselves over to sensuality and worldliness, because their undertaking proved to be far beyond their strength. Here then is the dividing line between those who succeed and those who fail in the highest enterprise of man. “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?” But if I can do this—if I can overcome the world—I can do and endure all things.

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If I can build up my character by faith, I can make the accomplishment of great good in the world practicable. I can find out what I am fitted for, I can feel myself equal to great things, while the small things of life will neither interrupt the greater nor be neglected.

And if these thoughts touching the strength afforded by Christ to character needed any further support, might they not find it in instances not very uncommon, where religion, entering the soul, seems to awaken both mind and heart from a brutish sleep, and to give new practical power to one who was conscious only of imbecility? All looked down upon him as beyond the reach of any appeal higher than the senses, and so inert he was that he read himself only in their judgments. And so he lived in a kind of animal contentment until the gospel came to him as a revelation both of the nobleness of man and of his own degradation, and as an offer of help and energy from the God who filleth all in all. He receives it as the buried plant receives the vernal rains, and he discovers who he is; he feels new impulses from truth, new power of achievement, a new will, a capacity to act not only for himself but beyond himself, not only in the world but above the

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world. He is transformed, not merely as all are whom the Spirit of God animates, but to such a degree that he is a wonder to himself and to all. But it is from Christ strengthening him that the power comes, and if he could lose sight of Christ, he would relapse into his old brutishness. Do you say, now, that this is only an instance of a strong motive coming into the soul you cannot tell how, and that other great occasions can do the same? Very likely. We do not pretend that the action of Christian principles on character is peculiar or unnatural. But what we say and what such examples confirm is that these principles are positive strength; they awaken not zeal only, nor resolute purpose, but a new consciousness of power and intellectual force; and this they do by connecting the soul with Christ and with the spiritual world. What acts on such natures is the same in kind with the less noticeable impulse in all souls that receive the gospel heartily. They now understand themselves better, at the same time that they receive a new motive power from Christ, and it may be that no other influence could have roused them from their torpor of soul, while this has brought about a change both entire and perpetual.

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1. We see from this exposition of the strength supplied by Christ, what a noble conception Christianity contains of the relation between the visible and the invisible worlds.

It is possible for a heathen sage, like Plato, to have a lofty standard of character, and to teach that it is the best of all attainments to become as much like God as possible. But in his endeavors to bring his principles to bear on practical life, he is met by a thousand difficulties. His own attempts at self-improvement are unsatisfying, if he is a man of the nobler type ; how then shall the mass of men without education or reflection, or established principles, be exalted into the likeness of God ? The only hope must be drawn from the institutions of society ; but if any dreamer imagined that a select order of philosophic governors could found and maintain such institutions in their purity, and keep themselves pure also, he was not likely to transmit his hopes through many lines of successors, or to have them reduced to practice. Now what was the weakness of their system ? It was that deficient as the standard was at its best, the means of improvement for the character were yet more deficient. There was no divine truth

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on which men could rely, and no divine assistance even so much as hoped for. Every seeker after wisdom must seek it in the way of philosophic system, and as for character,—that must grow by the resolute will and unaided efforts of each individual soul. Truth and motive and help were wanting.

Christianity came bringing truth from the invisible world into these regions of the senses and of time. And certainly it was a glorious thing for man to become sure that time is not cut off from eternity, nor earth from heaven, to have time enlarged into eternity, space into God's empire, and to hear the voice of God drowning all human voices by its loudness. Now there is something to live for ; man will not need any longer to despise his condition in this world, and, like an imprisoned thing, to search on every side of his cage for some opening into the outer air.

But if Christianity had done no more than only reveal the nature of God and the standard of action, would it have been any blessing to mankind ? How could it be a blessing if it aroused only a sense of guilt and a longing for deliverance, without supplying help and hope ? It is the promises of the gospel, then, that crown its glorious

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structure — the promise of pardon, of holiness, and of a strengthening Spirit. The prime glory of the gospel is that by this strength it secures the perfection of character, and enables the man to do all things which the august law of righteousness demands ; — in short, that it brings God down into the soul, to make it by His presence a fit temple for His praise.

2. It is plain, also, we add as a second reflection, that our subject condemns the *practical* character, as it is usually estimated in this world. The glory of man is practice, and the glory of the gospel is that it qualifies for practice. The practical man who truly deserves the name, has the advantage over the theoretical man, who lives for truth and not for action, because his end of being is a higher one ; and the advantage over the visionary man, because he does not judge either of means or of ends under the deceitful influences of hope and imagination. The practical man, after a worldly pattern, adapts his means nicely and shrewdly to his ends, but his ends are all visible, worldly ones ; he has no theory of morals and of life which has not been ground down by the current probabilities of the world, by maxims of expediency and prudence.

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He judges wisely concerning what is attainable within the reach of his eye, but draws no inspiration from a great, invisible future. He is shrewd in his management of men;—he governs senates, synods, banks, but of imagination, of the nobler sort of hope, he is destitute. He has no conception of an unseen world which runs by the side of this, and every now and then, by a silent movement, alters the course of worldly affairs. He dislikes theory. Theories of human progress according to a plan of God; theories of a kingdom of God which is destined to swallow up and appropriate all the forces of this world; theories of the improvement of human character by the discipline of life under a Divine Spirit—all this to him is a land of cloud and fog. His realities all lie on the earth, within the bounds of life, within the grasp, as it were, of his hand.

Now such a man can do great things within a narrow sphere; he will be the most sagacious, cautious, successful of men; he will incur few risks; he will not strive after the unattainable. But at the end of his successful life, what has he accomplished for himself or for mankind? And he needs for his low successes no especial

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trust or strength from above, if he is shrewd enough not to violate the laws by which the world is governed. He has no need to bring faith or God into his calculations. Instead of saying, “I can do all things through Jesus Christ which strengtheneth me,” he draws his strength from himself, and that strength is dexterously spent on this present world. Now, if the present world is all, he is worthy of imitation ; “go thou and do likewise.” But if we are made for eternity, learn his shrewdness, his power of adapting means to ends, his concentration of purpose, his reliance, but fill a sphere far apart from his ; lead a life according to the full measure of your powers with a kindred energy.

3. Finally, whatever we may accomplish in this world, that is of real value, we can take small credit for it to ourselves, because we have attained to success by the help of causes lying outside of ourselves — a favoring providence and the strength of God.

Only he can on any good grounds feel exultation who is indebted neither to man nor to God for his attainments. But where is there such a person ? The day laborer is nearest to this state of perfect independence, and yet the

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hoe and the rake which extend his arms, and the spade which utilizes the moving power of his foot, are the inventions of distant ages. For the preparation of their material, for the perfection of their form, hundreds of men have thought their best thoughts and done their best work. The same is true of all discoveries of principles and their reduction to practice; we make our labor profitable by means of the labors of others; their failures save us from failures, their successes are our inheritance. How small is the service rendered by any one man to the race, in any field of art or science, compared with the services contributed to him by past generations!

And in accordance with the same law of successive helpfulness, he who has refined his character or blessed the world by his work, must say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give the glory." For the thoughts which have disciplined him for his toil are the imperishable thoughts of former sages and philanthropists. The examples that animated him were set by the wise and good of all ages. The drama of the world has been played for him. Martyrs have bled for him. More than all, he

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would have remained at the best a wise worldling but for divine grace which came home to him in his sins, and rendered him a man of faith, self-denial, and execution ; which raised his standard of character, gave him courage and patience, and helped him to great things through a busy life.

And so the man who has turned out in old age a disciplined, purified and truly wise man, who, under God's training of him, and by the strength of faith has felt himself equal to things which, when he was immature, seemed quite out of his reach, such a man will say, "I can do all things through" — and only through — "Christ which strengthened me." As he looks back on the growth of his character, rising silently up, like the coral islands, out of the sea of sin, he discerns a divine foundation laid for him and in him. His native endowments were not his own. His efforts and self-discipline were aided from on high. His mind and heart fed on fruits which divine bounty had placed within his reach. Grace crowns the whole — grace, the pity and love of which he could not perceive, as we can not see the atmosphere, but which, as he now looks back, he sees to have been

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the main cause that made him will and do according to God's good pleasure. If that grace had left him, as if his own piloting were enough, what a wreck would he have made of himself at any point in the course of life! But grace would not let him go; it stood by him to the end. By its help he has conquered sin; he has found all things practicable to which he has been called; he has become ripe for heaven.

MY FRIENDS: It is a direct inference from the considerations brought before you in this discourse, that a person will best know what he can do in the world, when he has come into harmony with the divine plan and can feel that God is his friend and counsellor. Then, too, he is in his best condition to go through with his life-work until the end. Then, too, he can judge best of counsels in which he is called to take a part. That is practical and that is practicable which commends itself to a sound, self-sacrificing soul, united in its affections and in the spirit of loyalty to Christ. It was an inconceivably vast plan which he undertook to redeem the world, he began it without apparent resources against fierce opposition, he persisted in it to his last

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breath, he left it to his disciples as their work. Think what has been effected, and place the resources and strength of the gospel in the world now by the side of that despised man with his handful of followers. If he has succeeded can anything fail that he approves, can anything succeed in the end which he does not favor?

I exhort you to ally yourselves through life to those who have drawn strength for little duties and for great duties from Christ. Do not feel as if his strength is not needed until some great crisis comes to which your powers are unequal, but draw upon it daily in the smaller difficulties of life, in the daily trials of character, in the preparations for greater things. Remember that character is strength, and the strength of character is derived from those habits of faith, patience and uprightness, which are formed in the school of the great Master. To have been all along strengthened by Christ in the moral gymnastics of constant duty and trial — that is preparation for greater occasions, that is assurance of victory in trials. If you can, as you go on in the path of life, feel ready for whatever may come, if you are not afraid of emergencies — and that not by reason of any na-

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tive courage or stoic superiority to events, but by reason of a faith that grows with the growth of danger—then you will be ready for every event, and the reality of help on which faith fastens will not be far from you. I wish you success in life, but may it be success obtained by victory, not by circumstances, and may the victory be the victory of faith. FAREWELL.

## SERVING OUR GENERATION.

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"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption."—ACTS xiii. 36.

These words may be translated, as they are in the text of our version, "David, having served his own generation according to the will of God," or, "David, having in his own generation served the will of God," which is the rendering added in the margin by our translators. The sense is substantially the same whichever of the two constructions we adopt. I shall follow that which stands in our text, and which informs us that David served his generation, that such service was in accordance with the will of God, and that then by the same divine *constitution*, he fell asleep, was gathered to his fathers, and saw or experienced corruption.

Every man who lives as he ought is a servant and every man was intended to be a servant. In the family the father and mother are the servants of the children; in the State, the magistrate is the people's servant, his relation to the people being,

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in this respect the same, whether they choose him or whether the power in the State falls to him by hereditary right; in the Church, the pastor and teacher is the servant of the congregation, for which reason he is called a minister. The apostles did not disdain this title. "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ," says Paul; and again, "we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Even Christ himself, who had a right to Lordship and the service of others, says that "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Thus, no dignity, no height of station, no grasp of mind, takes a man out of this necessity of serving others, if he would fulfil the end for which he was made. Dignity is not measured, after the Christian standard, by the right of demanding the services of others, but by the number of those whom you can reach through your services. A man who can serve nobody is the lowest of human beings, except him who can do service to his fellow men and will not: he is lower than the lowest. Then, as the capacity to serve rises, or more exactly, as the number of persons whom, by posi-

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tion, power of mind and goodwill, a man can serve, becomes greater, so the service rises in degree, until we reach Christ, whose greatness consists in being the servant of the human race through all lands and ages.

Service is any *contribution made to the real good of mankind*; but it cannot be acceptable or praiseworthy unless performed with a definite intention of being useful. We have, then, two elements in that service which conforms to a Christian standard: first, a man must be occupied in doing something which promotes the wellbeing of men; and secondly, he must do this according to the will of God,—that is, the service must not be accidental, nor owing to our position only, nor the indirect result of our selfish aims, nor merely the fruit of a kind, benevolent temper; but there must be a distinct reference to the will of God as it respects the kind and amount of service in which we engage. So important is this purity of motive, this goodness of spirit directing and guiding our usefulness in life, that the ill-timed, abortive efforts of a Christian to do good, if his judgments are not misdirected by some moral obliquity of his own, are accepted as service rendered to God, even if they cannot be called service rendered to man. While on the

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other hand, the good wrought among men by one who has had the ulterior aim of benefitting himself, is not regarded as being good by God, however it may be estimated by men, and such service meets with no reward from the great Judge.

The text invites us first to contemplate serving our fellow men under the more specific and definite form of *serving our generation*. It is pleasant to come down from high-sounding talk about progress and the destiny of the human race, to such tangible and homely statements as this. There is a class of minds which are kindled by wide prospects of good, stretching over the world or over future ages, and yet feel no impulse to engage in the active service of the men among whom they live. Some great deed of benevolence, some great advance of human interests, some forward movement of mankind,—such things captivate their imagination, while they have no leisure or inclination for the steady service of the men of their own age and lifetime. At one time these wide views take the shape of philanthropy, at another of progress or the spread of civilization, and may in both cases be utterly barren and unchristian. Now, Christianity affords a field for such attractive generalizations in the great idea of the kingdom of God or of heaven, but it knows

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well that such grand conceptions cannot realize themselves without the successive additions made through long years by a multitude of men ; even as a stately building cannot build itself, but must rise by successive stories and by the hands of many workmen. And in order to bring down the great process of building up the kingdom of God within the reach of every laborer, of every mother, of every teacher, of every one, whatever be his or her sphere, it presents the work to us as an attempt to subserve the welfare of our generation according to the will of God.

The good we can each of us accomplish in this world is small. The good that all men in all ages could accomplish, if they would, is vast,—so vast as to realize the conception of the kingdom of God on earth. But this good can be accomplished only by combination, and through a succession of laborers. Hence, if one link in the great chain gives way, if one generation in the great succession proves faithless to its trust, the business of the next must more or less be to undo or to repair, instead of building up or carrying forward. If each generation serves the next as it ought, that is, if it contributes its quota to the sum of human good, real progress in a Christian sense is made—the kingdom of God is

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carried forward. But in order that this may be done, each working being, each individual source of power or influence, must serve his own generation, and do his part to render the next generation more efficient, to make the progress of the world faster and surer.

Thus it appears that all human improvement depends on the service which each generation renders to those that follow, and that this service depends on that which each person renders to his own generation. This being premised, we proceed to remark that in order to serve our generation, *we must have, each of us, a definite field of doing good*, the results of which can be reached, or at least are of probable attainment, within the limits of the age in which we live. Our action upon mankind must be indirect through our generation, and not direct; it must generally be *limited and local*, and not universal. There are a few persons, it is admitted, to whom it is given within their age or shortly afterwards to affect great changes among mankind. Such are the originators of useful arts and inventions, great reformers, and sometimes great revolutionists. But the mass of men, with the highest desires to do good, have a sphere beyond which they cannot pass, which is

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perhaps contracted, but in which they can act to the utmost advantage, and spend their energies successfully, if only they have the right will. Let us look at these two limits of the service we can perform within our generation by themselves.

First, then, *such service must*, in order to be truly such, to be efficient and practical, *be chiefly confined to influences and action upon our own generation.*

Here the obvious thought strikes us that every age of mankind differs from every other. It has its own sins, wants and ignorances, its own abuses to be corrected, its own capabilities of improvement, its own dangers of decline, its own ways of thinking and feeling, its own capacities of acting and of being acted upon. This difference between generation and generation is a necessary characteristic of the race of man, and the same difference affects the parts of the world within the same period. The individual is in many respects unlike himself as he passes through various stages and circumstances of life; but the race differs from itself, as time passes on, still more widely. And those differences, the peculiar character and wants of our times, must condition our modes of serving our generation. An angel, if he could come within the sphere of flesh, and could work as a man upon men, while still

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retaining his original powers, would need to subject himself to all the limitations of a particular age and a particular country, would need to identify himself in thought with those among whom he lived, as far as possible, would not need to be an abstract man or act on an abstract theory of doing good, but to become a man of his times, would find out how *his age* felt, and would feel likewise, and how it thought, and would think likewise—would need, in short, to be in sympathy with particular men and a particular age, in order to be in sympathy with mankind at all. Nay more, how did the Son of God himself act? He was born a Jew ; “He was sent,” as He says, “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;” He submitted himself to all the local and temporary rites of His country ; He rebuked its especial sins ; He warned against its immediate dangers ; He entered, moreover, into the closest sympathy with Galilee and with Jerusalem ; He had friends and a home which bound him more intimately to a particular spot and to certain persons than any other. And this He did with consummate wisdom. Although mankind in general—the human race through all the generations of time—was before His eyes, as the great whole which He came to save, yet He sought to plant salva-

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tion in one place, knowing that it would spread, under the laws of the kingdom of God, to all places, and to benefit one time, knowing that all times, all ages, would gather up in turn and increase the good He thus began.

Again, *we must in general have a specific sphere of good*, within which our services to our generation lie, and outside of which, if we are able to act at all, our action must be occasional, and such as not to interfere with our especial vocation. This is what Paul means when he says, “Having therefore gifts differing according to the grace given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the measure of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching.” And again, “As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk;” “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” There is such a thing as wasting ourselves from having too large a sphere and from going outside of our own sphere into that of another man. If we set ourselves up as inspectors-general of all about us, seeing how others do their work, and censuring them when they fail, we neglect our own, and we burden our shoulders with more than they can bear. Or if this be done, not

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from a love of influence or a desire of being busy, but from pure zeal for good, we lose much of our labor, we do badly both what is our own part and what is not. Neither impulse nor accident can determine what our appropriate sphere is; but in general, only the correct judgment of a Christian mind, acting at once in view of its capacities, its opportunities, and the openings of divine providence, can decide the question.

Again, *service to our generation must be chiefly local*, as well as confined to a specific range of employments. This, indeed, is obvious when we consider that our power of acting where we are known and on those we know, and the necessity for the most part of having some home, must determine our activities; that we are not travelling agents of benevolent zeal, but persons living on a certain spot, bound to certain others with a wider or narrower acquaintance, all of us capable of only a certain amount of well-doing. The *mother* serves her generation within the family, within the town, known only to a few beyond these narrow limits. The *teacher* serves his generation among his students, and may be the best of instructors, although known only to those whom he has trained or has now under his training. The *minister* confines his

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services in his generation to a few square miles of space, and, if there he acts his part well, it matters little that he is never seen elsewhere, is never heard on platforms, never appears in print, never “strives or cries or lets his voice be heard in the street.” If our little candle sheds its beams around us, our households, our schools or colleges, our parishes will be light. If, on the other hand, we stray away from the spot where we are husbandmen, to plant a seed or two here and a seed or two there, in places where we know not the qualities of the soil, and cannot watch the plant that has sprung up, most probably we shall lose our labors abroad and abridge them at home.

But lest I should be misunderstood, and should furnish false excuses to those who fail to do good when they have opportunity, it is necessary to add that although our services are chiefly confined to some particular offices in life, and to some particular spot, we are not *rigidly* shut up within these narrow limits. Our spheres are not *as distinctly defined* as those of the workman in a manufactory ; and moreover, *there is a large department of life*, the general work of doing good, *which is reserved for no one in particular*, and in which all must work who can. He, then, who will serve his generation

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according to the will of God, must not say that such work no more belongs to him than to others, but must feel that his part is to be done whether others do theirs or not ; nay more, that the neglect of others may require of him that he be the more laborious and self-denying. This department of doing good includes all humane, friendly, moral, political, Christian effort, which will be an uncultivated field, a desolate waste, if individuals cannot feel themselves called on to occupy and reclaim it. The *mother* must find her sphere in maternal duties ; there chiefly she serves her generation, and no one else can take her place, in order that she may make excursions to regulate and benefit society. But she is not usually so engrossed by her own calling that she cannot find time to visit the sick, the disconsolate, the poor ; to brighten society by kindly offices of friendship ; to help wherever she can be helpful. And, *if these occasional services are performed as they ought to be*, so far are they from interfering with the ordinary routine of duties that they rather relieve their monotony, and make their importance more apparent. So, too, the *teacher* has his appropriate office of teaching, which he cannot neglect without sin for any private studies or external cares. If at his post he serves not his

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generation, woe is unto him, he commits an act of infidelity to his trust and a crime against the minds and souls of his pupils. But he is not so wholly absorbed, it may be, by his work, that the instruction of a wider public and a multitude of acts of love towards his fellow men do not fall within his province. And these cares are so far from being inconsistent with his main work that they may throw life into his instructions, and help him to escape from the spirit of routine and drill into the spirit of loving instruction. So again *the minister* has it for his main work to wait on his ministering. No one can take his responsibilities from him, and woe to him if he discharges them without fidelity and earnestness. But there are higher interests of the kingdom of God, wider wants of mankind beyond his parish, which he can subserve, which help him to throw new zeal into his usual ministrations, and bring him back more contentedly into his daily pursuits. Thus the duties of our special spheres, and the occasional services to our generation outside of those spheres are by no means incompatible with one another; they are both necessary, and without both the world could make no progress.

But our text goes on to say that David served

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his generation *by the will of God*. Here the leading thoughts suggested are that *the will of God has established the relations of the individual to his generation*, and that we act in conformity with the Divine will when we serve the men of our time.

The race of men abides while the individual dies. The race is ignorant and sinful but is to be made wise and good by human means. Even the Gospel began with the second man, the Lord from heaven, and is spread by men, who act for Him. The race again can be carried forward but a little way by any one individual, for there is a time when he reaches his maturity, his thoughts are fixed, he becomes incapable of taking novel aspects of humanity as newer men might, he becomes obsolete, if I may so express it, and other, younger men are needed to take his place and to carry on the torch of human enlightenment. Even if there were no mortality of the single man, this would be necessary, for the mind stops growing after a certain period, runs in old moulds, and is less fitted for new exigencies of the human family. New ideas and new projects come not generally from the wisdom of old men, but from the originality of new men, stimulated, it may be, by the old.

Such being some of the relations of the individ-

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ual to the race and to the men of his time, it is manifestly the will of God, as indicated by these facts, that the man should throw himself not into a remote work for which he may be unfit, but into the scenes around him, serving his fellow men while he has experience to understand their wants and foresight of immediate evils, and while he has strength, energy and hopefulness for such labor. *But he must do this because it is the will of God.* In this way only service to man is connected with service to God, *benevolence and godliness are bound together.* We must choose our professions and callings in life with the most scrupulous inquiry what God would have us to do. We are not put in this world to enjoy life but to serve God in serving men. In fact we taste of true enjoyment only when we look away from the question of our own enjoyment. When in accordance with the will of God we adopt a profession or calling, we must take it as God's place for us where in all fidelity we can serve his will. Nor must we overlook the numberless ministries to our fellow men outside of our callings which it is the will of God that we should discharge.

And so we are to live, until in accordance with the will of God expressed in his providence, we end our work and prepare to *fall asleep.* *That will*

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*summons us to end our work, each in his turn, calling us out of the world away from our work individually as it bade us enter it.* And here we see a constitution or an ordinance of God wisely designed to carry the race forward and to make it one. *If generations rose and fell together, if men, like plants, had an equal length of life and disappeared at once, there could be no mankind.* What we call the human race would be broken into separate joints or links, between which, as they succeeded one another, there could be almost no communication, and almost no transmission of knowledge or art. Each generation would begin nearly where its predecessors began, and would end almost where they left off. Or *if, again, men should appear individually in the world, but should all attain to the same age of decay and death,* although in that case progress and all kinds of improvement would be possible, yet the assurance of life would destroy much of that feeling of dependence on the will of God which at present binds us to our Creator and Disposer. But now, when those who are born together die at very different times, and those who die together differ widely in the length of their lives, the best constitution of things seems to be secured. The

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man of ninety survives as a witness to the past, and the man of thirty lives by his side, gathering up the fruits of his experience, but uniting to them the additions which later years have made to the common stock. The old, the middle aged, the young live together and die indiscriminately. Thus, when the race is considered, there are properly no generations. The race has a steady outward flow. The individual calls those who live with him his generation, his contemporaries, but it is because his life is limited, and his end is soon to come.

*When that end comes, if a man has served his generation according to the will of God, he falls asleep.* A beautiful expression to dwell upon, for, first, it implies a resting from the work and weariness of life. How often amid grave responsibilities life is a burden, and the overcharged man longs, as the laborer, for his time of rest. This feeling increases as the bodily powers decay, and were centuries added to the sum of life with our present powers and burdens, how slow the end would seem to come. But now, the wearied man, when he feels himself unequal to the old burdens and is beginning to be aware of his decay, needs to wait but a little while before his release shall

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appear. It is a release, if he has served God in serving his generation, like a gentle slumber, the day's work is over, he lies down and in a moment the weary body, the worn out mind are in repose.

It is a *sleep* again because there is before him an assurance of a blessed *waking*. The infant need not slumber more securely than he, for he has cast off all his care and puts his hope in God. He knows in whom he has believed and is persuaded that he is able to keep that which is committed to him against that day. He believes, that Jesus died and rose again, and that even so them also which sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him.

But this end of his earthly service is denoted in our text by two other forms of speech. He is *gathered to his fathers* and *he sees corruption*. The former phrase derived its significance from the practice of burying in family vaults, where the children and remoter descendants were collected with the founders of the line. But as the phrase is sometimes used of those who have not been buried with their ancestors, it has been thought to assume a wider meaning of a great congregation of the dead, where families are reunited; or in other words to point somewhat obscurely at a future life. In the text, however, coming as it does between the

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phrases 'he fell asleep' and 'he saw corruption,' it can mean only simple burial. By this act of burial, and more fully by the process of corruption, the *separation* from the world of service and from the generation where one has served *is rendered complete*. The worker ceases from his work, is placed out of sight, fades by degrees from the memory of the living, until he sinks into almost total oblivion. And so too the generation which he served passes away to be forgotten, or so nearly forgotten that by and by only the painstaking antiquary and historian can recover some few characteristics of it, and can point out some few men, generally bad men, who have figured in it. The rest are as though they never were.

*The value of life then consists* not in being remembered, but in serving one's generation according to the will of God. There is an uneasy desire of reputation in many minds, and in others of larger aspirations a desire to be known and recorded after all connection with the earth has ceased. But history is so crowded with names already, and so few in every generation are known even by name after a few centuries, that such longings are empty, not to say that the character formed under their influence is selfish, dependent on the opinion

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of others, and displeasing to God. We must be soon forgotten, that is according to the will of God. It is not desirable that the individual should be remembered long, and if known widely while he lives, the distinct knowledge of him ceases soon after his death. What he has achieved, what he has done for his generation, passes into the general stock. This is never lost. No good that the humblest of us has wrought wholly dies. *You are a teacher.* If you have been faithful, some good has flowed from you into the mind and heart of your pupil, and perhaps he was aware of it at the time. But by and by other influences lend their aid to form his mind and character, and what you have done cannot be distinguished from newer forces which act on the youth and on the man. Perhaps you have thrown some seed into his mind which after long years bears fruit, and he ascribes the good to some one else. What then? If you have served God in serving him, God remembers it although he does not. There is one long unerring memory in the universe out of which nothing good ever fades. So of the *author*. He expects a wider and more lasting public. But at length his works are unread, because every man writes for his times, and succeeding times have a higher standard of

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knowledge, or need to have the same truth looked at from another point of view. Even in religion it is so. How different the practical writings of the Puritan age from those which now inculcate the same doctrines and the same religious experience. But what of that, if they served their generation, if others by their aid attained to something truer and nobler, if the world has been helped on by influences from their pens? *Is it not well to be superseded*, if we can train others into wiser and better men than ourselves? And if the world is making advances, this must be so. *Or shall we turn to the minister?* He served his generation in the noblest of all works. But he dies, others take his place, and engage the affections of the parish; only a few old people remember the man of thirty and forty years ago. But what would the parish now have been without him? And how many of the young through their fathers and their mothers, have drawn from him the first impressions of their childhood that led them on to God. *So it is with the reformer.* In his hard and weary service, in the course of which public opinion has been crucifying him, he has served his generation according to the will of God. Perhaps he dies in discouragement and despondency, feeling that he has lived too soon. But

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so much of resistance to evil was necessary before eyes and hearts could be opened. His successors enter into his labors. He was remembered for a while to be hated. Now he begins to be blessed. But soon again he is forgotten because the reform is completed. His power has flowed into the life of the world. He has helped to remould society.

Let us then, my friends, in a self-forgetting life, aim to be followers of Him who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life as a ransom for many." As He was sent to the lost "sheep of the house of Israel," let each one of us feel that we are sent to do an immediate and direct work, through which alone whatever we do for mankind outside of our field is to be attended with wisdom, energy and success. And as He, in the comparatively small and humble sphere of His personal ministry, kept mankind,—the other sheep that were not of that fold, the many for whom He gave His life as a ransom,—before His eye, let us feel, while acting each of us his subordinate part, the gushing of a wide benevolence which will make us do our best where and when we act. Thus shall we be getting ready to meet our divine Lover and Friend, who is highly exalted because He "emptied Himself and made Himself of no reputation."

## GOD'S GUIDANCE IN YOUTH.

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"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?"—JEREMIAH iii. 4.

The proper sense of these words, as the original and the connexion indicate, is a rebuke to unfaithful Judah for calling God her Father, and claiming Him as having been the guide of her youth, while yet she persisted in her sin. Yet our translation conveys a sense, at once so beautiful and so truly scriptural, that I shall not hesitate to build upon it the thoughts which I wish to lay before you at the present time. The guidance of God, what it is, our need of it from our youth onward, His willingness to be our guide, in what and to what extent we may look for His direction,—these are some of the subjects which such a text suggests. They seem to commend themselves to us as being appropriate and timely. *You* are doubtless sobered by the thought that you are on the threshold of life together, and about to take your separate paths alone. You are catching glimpses of life as in a track through the woods. You see the distant

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light through the branches, and know not where or when you will reach the open sky. *I*, for my part, am sobered by the feeling that in bidding farewell to you almost my last official act in this place will have been performed, that my main life work is nearly ended. Bear with me then, if with more than my usual authority, with more paternal feeling than has been my wont, I call on you to consider the importance of taking God for your guide through the employments of life. Will you not, each one, from this time cry unto God, My Father, be thou the guide of my youth?

This cry, if you can sincerely utter it, *is an all-comprehensive one*. Although, *in its terms*, it asks of God to be a guide through the days of inexperienced and uncertain youth, it will *in fact* include his guardianship for the whole of life. No one ever uttered it who expected in middle life or in old age to need no counsel or help from God. As life reaches its meridian and begins to decline, the need which prompts the cry is none the less felt. The responsibilities of mature life, the decaying vigor of old age will prompt it as much as when in youth

“The world is all before us, where to choose  
Our place of rest and Providence our guide.”

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And, moreover, the sense of security under the divine wing will be so full of joy and restfulness, that the soul which has known this peace in youth will not roam abroad in quest of something more satisfying afterwards.

But the earnestness of the cry lies in the words "will thou not *from this time*." There is an immediate need. The guidance is wanted now at the beginning of the journey, both because a mistake now may send its harmful influence through the whole of life, and because the feeling of loneliness as well as of uncertainty prompts the appeal. There may be critical moments, turning points, hereafter, more grave, less full of hope, than this starting from the barriers upon the untried race; but there never can be a time concentrating more interest than this—a transition from companionship to separate paths, from gaiety of heart to anxiety, from dependence on others to self-sustaining exertions, from a little quiet harbor to the great sea of life.

And at such a time the cry of the text addresses God as a *Father*. This of course implies vastly more than the title *God* or *Lord* could do. It implies a personal relation—that he is willing to take and take care of each of you as of a son, that as

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such he will be, if you desire it, a veritable guide, that his Providence is no distant care, as of a creature, but an intimate one as of a child,—and that whatever may rationally interest an earthly Father,—our temporal welfare, our character, our projects, our eternal life,—will have his deeper interest. No one can say my Father honestly, without a faith that brings the soul near to him and him near the soul, and that, at one bound, overleaps all the difficulties that surround the doctrine of providence. Let us all call him so, let those enquiries rest which meddlesome reason raises, but cannot solve. They are all solved, the moment God's fatherly character affects our souls, and they trouble us no more.

Wilt thou not be the *guide* of my youth? What is implied on our part if we can honestly use such language towards God? We intend that such guidance is *a very great favor*, and that we desire it as a *security from great evil*. We imply in it so much uncertainty and self-distrust that we dare not undertake any thing of importance alone. We believe also that the encouragement which such guidance can afford may be a great aid towards success in life. Without knowing *how* God will guide, or being sure that he is in every particular instance such a guide, we feel that a *general faith*

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*in his protection*, of itself, is a great incitement to patience, and hope, and that *the protection itself is a great reality.*

But I fancy, as I speak of God's guidance as of a thing most desirable and most inspiriting, for us all, old and young, that I can hear some one uttering half aloud words like these ; " It is a good and precious thing to talk of God as a guide, and to weaker natures it may be an encouragement, but for the strong, *self-reliance* is the road to success. Let me be numbered with the bold-hearted ones who press forward in the full use of their energies, to seize the prizes of the world. I will, by my God-given vigor, leave the timid halting in the rear ; they may think, if they please, of the helps on the way ; I have no leisure for that but only for the goal that I see in the distance. I know that I may fail, but I support myself by my enthusiasm, until the failure confronts me."

My friend, has it never occurred to you that a principle of action like trust in God may be most efficient, without being every moment before the mind ? The soldier does not think of his country in the hottest of the fight but of the work at hand ; he forgets all things else for the time, and yet the motive of love to country was never more powerful.

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We do not go back to our feelings of love to our families or of attachment to our friends every moment, yet we love them none the less. So trust in God as our life-guide may be a strong and steady principle, although we may not think of it for hours or days. It is at its post to act whenever occasion demands, it may need to make no suggestions and give no warnings for a long interval. How then can it interfere with earnestness of action or obstruct success? You are altogether right in making the most of what your own powers can accomplish, but perfect independence, if there were no God and no divine plan, would be impossible and even absurd. Without instruments, without companionship, without the treasures of past labor and thought, how small would be the attainments of the bravest man. The most daring and hopeful soldier would be stripped of half his energy, if he could not rely on his officer or on the men of his company. Even so, if there is a God who is willing to assist his creatures, who, not only by the general laws of his providence, but by his direct presence and spiritual sway over mind and soul, can be our guide, is it not something like madness to refuse his proffered hand, on the plea that it is unmanly to ask for assistance upon the pathway of

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life. They who take such a course will be likely to sink the deepest into despair, when they find themselves utterly unequal to the problems and the crises that suddenly call for new counsels.

But on the other hand God's guidance can only be expected by those who rely on themselves to the measure of their powers. He is criminally weak, who folds his hands and expects God to endue him with some special energy, who sits still and expects God to make the first move. He is strong and will renew his strength, who believes that with God's aid he can do more than his own unaided abilities can accomplish. There may, indeed, be a few occasions in every man's life, when we are without counsel and know not whither to turn. At such times no action is possible and activity is out of the question, so that inaction is then no crime, and preparation for the unknown future is the only duty. The believing but self relying man will wait in trust for the darkness to clear away, and his experience of the remarkable openings which seem to come directly from heaven will probably be an encouragement for the whole of his future life.

But what are we authorized to expect from God, when we in all sincerity ask him to guide our lives?

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*It is not implied that he will gratify our wishes or fulfil our expectations to the letter. In that case we should guide him and have him follow our counsels. Nor is it implied, if we desire him for our guide in certain things, and refuse either to ask or to take his counsel in other respects, that he will consent to lead us at all. If we go astray in our self-will, we shall be left to ourselves, unless his compassionate counsel, as often happens, cures us through our mistakes, and turns them into mercies. Nor, again, will he so guide us that we can see his hand, or separate the threads of his direct agency from the thread of his general law. It will therefore be always free for us to doubt whether he has interposed, whether the opening in the skies is due to a wind scattering the clouds, or to the touch of his finger. Faith believes, nay rather sees, that he is present in his world and present with believing hearts, but it can penetrate no farther. Nor yet—to mention but one limitation more—will he undertake to reconcile our purposes, when they clash with one another: He will not so guide us, that if our faces are set in one direction he will show us our way thither, while he leads us in another. It may be praiseworthy for one of us to enter into business with the hope of getting riches; but he will not help us if we*

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want to be rich and to be learned at once, or to be distinguished and to have a life of quiet together ; and so, if we set our hearts on being good, he may be our best guide in disappointing our inferior schemes, because he sees that in our case goodness and earthly success cannot be reconciled.

But apart from such limitations there is nothing, no situation of life in which he is really needed, no state of mind or soul which requires his help, no problem of thought fit for man to solve, no crisis of action where duty is thrown upon you, where you may not invoke and claim his guidance. He confines not his leadings to action and withholds them from opinion, nor to what is *spiritual*, refusing to show us our path in the *secular* work of life. The great is not his province to the neglect of the small, any more than—to borrow a thought from Plato—it is the masons part to lay the great stones of a wall and not fill up the chinks with little ones. To him nothing is great, nothing is small in itself, but his Divine plan, which uses small and great alike is great, and character which he works upon by the small things of life is to be made great, and so every thing in its place is of importance.

Among those things which you may refer to God and for which especially you will ask counsel

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of him, I mention several by themselves. *One of these is the choice of a profession or calling.* These are the names which we give to one especial life work, to those branches of labor which we declare ourselves to have embraced, or to which we regard ourselves to have been called or summoned. But whence does this *call* proceed, except from him who has endowed us with our gifts and has bestowed upon us our opportunities? The call can proceed from no other source. Society sometimes undertakes to come between the free choice of the individual and the pursuit of many of the vocations. It obstructs the way for persons of a certain rank or birth, or it even judges of the qualifications of men for the pursuits of life, and either opens or shuts the door according to such an estimate of fitness. But in our land every calling is open to every one, and it is easy to pass from one calling to another, if success do not attend our first efforts. So much the more need for every young man to ask himself what he can do best in the world, and how best he can serve God and his generation. And shall he ask himself without at the same time asking one who knows him better than he knows himself? Shall he come to a point in his way, where a decision may involve a complete failure or

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the largest success, and not take counsel of the oracle which no prejudice can misguide, and no ignorance can blind? If he fails to say "Father be thou my guide in choosing my life work," on what other occasion can he ask, or expect to have that counsel imparted to him? Or will he say that by a sober estimate of his powers and his chances he is led to one choice rather than another,—that his decision is so clear that he needs no counsel? I reply, if he has asked for guidance, and done his best towards forming his decision, he needs to do no more. But if he has felt no desire for aid from heavenly wisdom, how can he look for it when he enters upon the dry and perplexing duties of his vocation? What right will he have to appeal to the fatherly protection of God, when cares annoy and burdens weigh down his heart, if he chose it without being chosen himself for it? Much of our ill success proceeds from our original wrong choice of our profession, and many of our mistakes in choosing proceed from the want of that sure eye, that unbiassed discernment which God, in his unseen, undiscoverable way, can give us.

On the other hand, let a young man start in his career with humble, child like petitions for guidance that he may make no mistake in regard to his

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future calling, that he may not rashly intrude into a place which is not properly his, nor shrink in self-distrust from one which he can fill, nor be led astray by self indulgence or covetousness or ambition into a field whence he can reap only self-dis-satisfaction and the self-reproach of having wasted his powers—let a young man, I say, sincerely put up this prayer, and the very temper which it implies will calm and balance his mind, so that neither excited desire, nor fear, nor exaggerated hope will influence his counsels. His spirit of itself will be a check on a wrong choice, inasmuch as the eye of his reason will be clear and dispassionate. But is this subjective state, this action upon himself all? So the atheist must say, and so the deist, who worships a distant and unknown God. And they must add that the noblest results for character and life have come from a vain dream, from a senseless faith in Providence, as a power that “shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will.” But we, who cannot refer such beneficent effects to falsehood, see in the very constitution of our nature, which craves for and runs after the help of God, a pledge that he is willing to be our guide, that he has a direct agency in moulding our counsels and our lives for the best ends, if we will only let him.

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In the next place we add that God will guide us, if we wish, *into right opinion and persuasions in regard to Divine truth.* Every observing and reflecting man must have noticed that moral truth has no force of its own to penetrate into the heart and control the life, but is continually resisted by whatever there is of evil in our nature. Pride instinctively opposes the humbling truths which bring men low; self-conceit prompts to reject the *deepest* truths for falsehoods that are shallow; we seek to escape a sense of sin by destroying the force of such doctrine as excites the feeling; worldliness and impurity, unable to bear strict obligations, open the mind to objections against the authority which claims to be from God; fear seeks to avoid whatever arouses fear; and so every emotion, every desire may be enlisted in the service of the reigning sin. When barriers like these are surpassed, a great good is gained for the soul; it has become unbiassed, calm, trustful, open to all truth from all quarters. Having thus been brought into harmony with divine realities, *many persons* have little perplexity or doubt afterwards. They can take God in his word as their guide, and the experience of the Gospel in their souls is continually adding its weight to former convictions. But it is often oth-

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erwise with the *thoughtful student*, above all at the time when he passes out of the hands of instructors whose opinions he has embraced, as he ought to do before his own judgment has become mature. Now, when his reason is ripe, he feels impelled to examine the foundations for himself. Doubts disturb him and demand a solution. What shall he do? Shall he feel that it is a sin to doubt? But it is no sin, unless a sinful bias has brought on the doubt, and *he* finds no such bias,—on the contrary, it is his highest wish to reach firm ground, to have a faith on which his soul may lean for life and at death. It is true indeed that a perfect character and a perfect life would be accompanied by a satisfactory faith that the Gospel is not a cunningly devised fable, nay the faith would grow into an assurance. But an imperfect, struggling Christian, is met by temptation at the point where he is most easily assailed; and for the disciplined mind, trained by logic and by processes of demonstration, whom neither sensual desire nor worldly advancement can easily lead astray, for him attacks on the reality of religion and on the authority of the divine word are the hardest to be repelled. Above all is this true at the present day. The literature, the science, the metaphysics most admired and followed

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are thickly sown with doubt. The scriptures are robbed of their authority for many, who mourn for the lost Eden from which with aching hearts they have been expelled. Not only is inspiration given up, as a theory refuted by the peculiarities of the sacred word itself, but revelation, the last refuge, is abandoned. And thus we see all around us moral weaklings without trust and without hope, who look here and there for some new light, who put no confidence in the faith in which their forefathers lived and died, and yet have found no substitute for it anywhere under the broad heavens.

Now at such times when minds, especially inexperienced minds, stagger under the burden of doubt, and feel that heaven and earth are growing dark before their eyes, are they left to their poor logical faculties? Must they work out their problems, which touch the most vital of their interests, alone? If there was a friend who had borne the same weight of perplexing thoughts, would not the knowledge that he has come out into the light be an encouragement? But a greater encouragement is the sympathy of God. Do not believe, my young friends, that God offers himself as a guide in his providence, and a guide towards a holy life by his Spirit, and yet will leave the mind alone which so-

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berly explores the dark places of truth in the hope of his aid. *How* he can aid it is useless to ask ; but *that he can aid*, who is *truth itself and has sure access to minds and hearts*, you must not doubt. He may move in all silence, he may act on the soul and so on the mind indirectly, he may cause—as often happens—external things to illustrate truth in some remarkable manner. But be assured of this—that if, in obedience and hope you wait on him, he will bring you to the sunlight at last. And then the rest, the peace of having passed through and left behind you the wilderness of doubt will be a lifelong enjoyment.

I mention one other occasion when the cry, “My Father, be thou the guide of my youth,” will be especially needed. Very many lives that are prosperous have a story of this kind to tell : that once or twice their way was blocked up ; they knew not which way to turn ; willing to do everything manly for themselves they stood alone ; heaven and earth seemed to be aloof from them. At such times how feeble does the man seem to himself ; he cannot create circumstances ; he cannot find the place fit for him to fill ; he waits and waits, until hope and courage are ready to go out. I can tell you of one such experience. It was not fear of poverty which

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disturbed him, but apprehension lest he should do nothing in the world, lest no place should be found for him, and his life should run to waste. He was at an utter loss ; he stood like the Jewish king who said, "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us : neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee." At an extremity like this God appeared, and with his finger pointed to him his way. He entered into the newly-opened path with so little of self-direction, so little of prescience, that the guidance which he invoked in the spirit of this text seemed almost visible to the outward eye. God was indeed there and was leading him. And the conviction followed him through a long life. Such guidance, where the road seemed to come to an utter end, was a more impressive, more enduring lesson for his faith than all the direct arguments for a providence.

And if on such occasions we are allowed to hope that God will be our guide, we may look for Him to follow us through all the scenes of life. And what better guide could we have than God, as He is revealed to us in the scriptures ? We want a guide who knows us, whether we be self-willed and over-confident, or despondent and over-sensitive, or worldly and aspiring. We want a guide who knows

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our frame and pities us, is not vexed with our ignorance or mistakes, but is tender towards us and patient. We want a guide who values character, and knows how to *train while* he guides ; who guides for the purpose of training, sometimes into very hard paths, but very profitable for the soul. And this is a comforting thought, particularly for a youth entering into life where he must act and think for himself, that while he outgrows his position in the family, and becomes the equal of his father and mother, God takes the place of his earthly parents. He is now a separate personality, and probably removed in place from them. He toils on with industry and hope. Burdens of responsibility are laid upon him, which weigh on his spirit. He asks God to help him bear them, and feels them to be lighter. The temptations of business or politics crowd around him, but he asks God to help him keep his integrity, and is heard. Amid the crowd of the time-serving and corrupt, he follows the counsels of God, and is safe from the defilements of the world. Amid the vacillating and uncertain he knows what to think and how to act. You might imagine that his eye has become so clear and his step so sure, that he can now foresee all danger and choose his path alone, with-

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out needing divine help. But the joy of acting in harmony with God's will, the instinct of dependence, the experience of failure, if ever he has in his self-will wandered from his guide, are his monitors now. He would not choose his own path if he could, any more than he would live for himself, if that were permitted to him.

And so, if life is prolonged, he begins the last act of his life-drama as a truly wise man—a corrected, disciplined, refined man—one who is ready for that degree which he will soon receive from the hands of his great Teacher and Counsellor. Compare him, I will not say with the hoary sensualist, but with the old man who has spent his active powers in living for the world, and who now, when he has nothing to give to God save a poor fragment of life, has come under the sway of a Gospel which gladly receives all. What a different experience can *he* tell of, who has followed God's guidance from that of the old man put into the hospital, so to speak, in order to have his spiritual maladies cured and his character made ready for heaven. His memories tell of God's deliverances and upholdings, and therefore he is confident and tranquil as he looks towards his setting sun. He prays with confidence in the words of the Psalmist, "Now, also, when I

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am old and gray-headed, forsake me not, O Lord, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation and thy power unto one that is to come." His testimony is that God's strength has been with him through a long life, and is now, when the powers of nature are failing, most manifest. His faith in God as a guide grows stronger, whether it be experience or some instinct of a purified heart that gives the added strength. If the doctrine of Atheism were true, and there were no divine governor of the world, you would suppose that his life experience would contradict and undermine his faith, that his fond dream of having God for his guide would suffer shipwreck on the dreadful reality of things. But his convictions have grown strong amid those very difficulties which lead so many into practical Atheism. To deny that there is an ever acting, ever vigilant providence, would be for him to deny one of the oldest and most vigorous of his convictions; one, the tenacity of which no personal trials, no events in the world, can shake. And so he believes in a divine guidance of mankind, as well as of his own life. If life has taught him that God has been his guide, assuredly larger interests are under the same guidance. He sees the faith of Christendom assailed and tottering, but this does

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not destroy his confidence. God is indeed slower than he had imagined, but whether fast or slow, His plan rolls on towards its accomplishment. He sees great disasters poured as viols of wrath on men, but as he traces the divine hand in his own afflictions, so also he sees that public sin cannot be checked without public judgments. Is he not, then, blest, if with such serenity and hope for the world and for himself, he can commit all human interests into the hands of his heavenly guide.

I invite you, then, my young friends, to this faith in God's guidance, so encouraging, so assured of its own foundation in reality, so persistent and undecaying. Some of you will without doubt die young, and it will be a severe test of your characters that your proudest earthly hopes will prove vain. But if you accept what is ordered as the divine plan for you, you may descend into the grave with joy, glad that God has better work for you on high. Others, setting out with headstrong will and immense desires, will pursue their own way without regard to the divine will. Most happy will it be for them if even great disasters—the overthrow of their life-plan, the shipwreck of their hopes, shall bring them to distrust their own counsels, and to put themselves under the direc-

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tion of the heavenly Counsellor. Others, again, whether walking with God or without Him, will reach the boundaries of old age, the few survivors of the hundred who now listen to my voice. I conceive to myself these survivors—some ten or fifteen perhaps in all—assembling here fifty years after their graduation. They open the triennial at the class-list, which by its many stars now shows that God is not only a guide but a supreme disposer. The class history is reviewed in order. Just, yet generous, fully aware of the characters of the departed, yet kind to the memories of those who have fallen by the way, they pass from name to name. Here is one whose name moves across their lips, who lived in mute inglorious ease, standing still in life, without aim or effort. And they pass him by, thinking, some of them, that if God had been accepted as his guide, even he might have been cured of his indolence, and have done something for mankind. Here another is mentioned, who has not only done nothing, but worse than nothing ; he gave himself up to self-indulgence, self-indulgence ripened into vice, and his life was a wreck. Poor fellow ! these old men say, he was kind : he could never say No ! And they drop a tear over him, and go on. Here is

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another of whom little was expected ; but he used his powers to the best advantage ; he made people feel that he was upright ; he seemed to have, and he had, God with him. His useful, honorable course closed amid many lamentations, nor is he forgotten by his fellow men. Here is another who seemed to be a sincere Christian, but he fell into doubt so deep that it reached the foundations of his faith. He thought that he could find out everything for himself, and in the end he gave up Christ, he gave up God. We will not judge him, say these old men, but they know that with a little less self-conceit and a little more earnestness, he would have come out right. And here is a list of those bright ones who entered into their life-work with the high resolve and vigor of conquerors of men and of nature. Where are they, and what have they done ? Here one of them is named who fell into illness that shut him out from active life ; he chafed and complained of God ; he refused in his self-will to go into God's school. Another of them, in the same fortunes, saw God's hand in what had befallen him, bowed his head in submission, and passed down with such a serene light to the grave, that the event of almost a generation before is a precious, a hallowed memory, for these aged

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survivors. Nor will cause of rejoicing fail to them as they review the career of others among the leaders of the class, who, either in the quiet of an even life or under the stroke of disappointment, saw God nigh them, and took His hand as their life companion. And then the list ends with those happy ones who from college life onward pursued a steady Christian course ; it was no false, quickly-dying fire, no crackling of thorns under a pot, that principle of theirs, but an undying flame. a breath from heaven ; they went on from strength to strength, until their guide, when the right time came, conducted them upwards.

And these surviving representatives of the class themselves, whom we conceive to be thus passing judgment on the deceased ones,—what judgment will God pass on them, what judgment will they be obliged to pass on one another ? Will they come to that fiftieth year from their graduation in such a spirit that they shall be able to say, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,—yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me?” May you all, dear friends, the shortlived and the longlived, follow God’s counsels, and thus attain to true practical wisdom. My last testimony to you from this place

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and in this office shall be, that to follow God's guidance is to attain to true peace, and that whatever faults cling to us through our lives are chiefly due to our self-will taking the government of our lives into its hands. And my last assurance shall be that as you increase in years, and look back on a length of way already traveled, it will be a joy to be conscious that you have endeavored, however feebly, to walk with God. I bid you an affectionate farewell.

















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